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### **Attorney General's Office Secures Closure of Middletown Drug House**

**Middletown** – Following eight years of constant illegal drug activity threatening the welfare of their neighbors, the owners and residents of a Middletown residence have been ordered to vacate the premises as the result of a lawsuit brought by the Attorney General's Nuisance Abatement Initiative.

"No one should have to raise their family with an open-air drug market next door," Attorney General Beau Biden said. "Now this neighborhood can breathe a collective sigh of relief. Properties like this threaten their communities with the crime and violence that go hand-in-hand with the drug trade. These property owners are being held responsible for permitting illegal drug activity on-site. We will continue to aggressively use this powerful tool to combat drug activity in communities up and down our state."

On March 20, prosecutors filed the lawsuit, seeking the immediate closure of the property because of the threat the ongoing activity posed to the community. Following a hearing last Tuesday in New Castle County Superior Court, Judge Peggy L. Ableman agreed with the Department of Justice and ordered its immediate closure. Prosecutors and police have shuttered the property.

The lawsuit alleged that the house, located on a residential cul-de-sac at 614 Dove Nest Court, is known in the community as a location to purchase and use illegal drugs. A neighbor's testimony at last week's hearing confirmed that two to three cars per hour pull up to the house for short periods of time after being visited by members of the household. An expert witness testified that the activity was consistent with an open-air drug market. Since the house was purchased in 2003 by defendants Ericka Ballard and Curtis Mack, at least four search warrants have been executed on-site, each yielding drugs, ranging from heroin and cocaine to marijuana and prescription pills, and resulting in arrests.

Attorney General Biden also thanked the Middletown Police Department for the substantial assistance they provided in the investigation.

The Middletown property is the 16<sup>th</sup> to be shut down since the launch of the Nuisance Abatement Program, which Attorney General Biden expanded statewide in August, 2007. The program uses the state's Drug Nuisance and Social Vices Abatement Act to identify and investigate properties where drug and vice crime is permitted to flourish, and offers property owners the choice to abate the nuisance or be forced to defend themselves in court. The Attorney General's office identifies nuisance properties statewide through its own investigations and in cooperation with state and local police agencies, local authorities, civic associations, and neighborhood residents. To date, over 125 nuisances have been abated and nearly 400 properties remain on the Program's "watch list."

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